

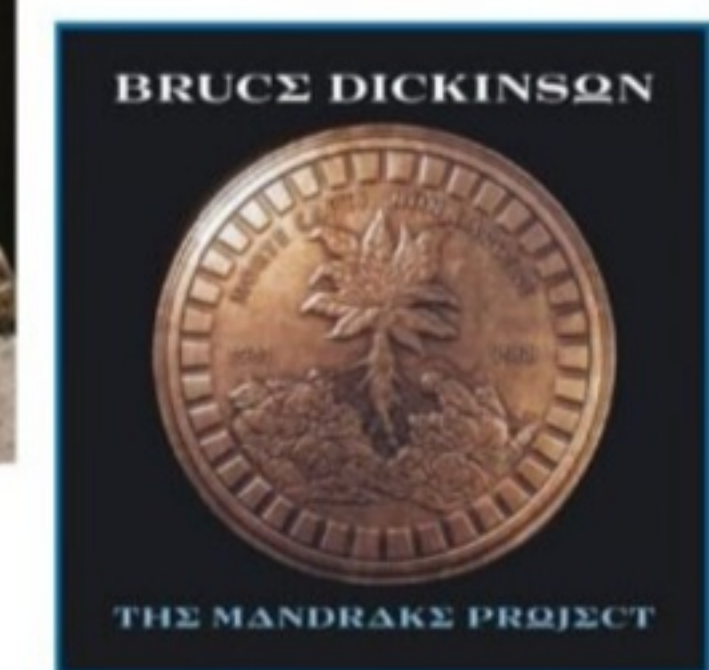
Bruce Dickinson reveals the full force of his dramatic pulling power

BRUCE DICKINSON

The Mandrake Project

BMG

Metal's celebrated frontman embarks on an all-encompassing adventure



AFTER SPLITTING FROM Iron Maiden in 1993, Bruce's solo career ascended to a stunning creative apex with 1998's *The Chemical Wedding*, a heavyweight William Blake concept opus providing sharp relief against the contemporaneous Maiden disc, low-point *Virtual XI*. Hatchets have long since been buried, and Bruce's creative focus has remained Maiden-centred for nearly

THE MANDRAKE PROJECT FLIES BY, BUT STILL FEELS LIKE AN EPIC JOURNEY

20 years, assimilating his eccentric force of personality into a six-way endeavour. Unloosed again at last from these democratic checks and balances, Bruce's extraordinary voice – in every sense: larynx, character and attitude – resounds from guitarist Roy Z's spectacularly thick, fervid production. The singer has rarely sounded more assertive, upfront and in your face, while his commitments to narrative storytelling and wide-open imagination have seldom reached higher, urging his vocals to new levels of expressive emotion and dramatic control.

As with *The Chemical Wedding*, there is a powerful

unifying sweep to the album, even if the concepts can feel quite cryptic and abstruse, with meanings and nuances that need to be unlocked like new levels of a game quest. Videogames, rather than movies, are a plausible pointer to the album's soundtrack-like impulses. Atmospheric noises and symphonic flourishes burst and brood with dark, grainy intensity, making a virtue of their synthetic origins. Crucially, these densely layered, orchestrated soundscapes and sophisticated arrangements are frequently counterpointed against direct, stripped-back volleys of classic metal heroism. Killer tunes like *Many Doors To Hell*, goth-tinged headbanger *Resurrection Men* and the non-balladic half of *Shadow Of The Gods* impel delirious raised fists with their spunky



NWOBHM riffing and meaty, scream-along choruses.

Bruce's best solo work has always skewed towards heftier tones. Pants were soiled in '98 by *King In Crimson's* Obituary-heavy guitar sound, and *The Mandrake Project* rapidly pulls its weight, opening advance cut *Afterglow Of Ragnarok* getting underway with a marauding riff that's half Swedish true metal sword-wavers Grand Magus, half UK death metal warhorses Bolt Thrower. One fascinating, unprecedented surprise is the remake of Iron Maiden's *If Eternity Should Fail*, here ominously retitled *Eternity Has Failed*. Shorter, slower, heavier and darker than the song we've known and loved for nine years, this is technically its original incarnation, a measure of how long this LP has taken to come together. Either way, it's a great song, arguably besting the original by substituting

a real flute for Maiden's synthesised trumpet intro.

The Mandrake Project demands and rewards total absorption into its kaleidoscopic sound picture. Multiple strands of Bruce's solo career are drawn together throughout. There's the accessible hard rock of 1990's *Tattooed Millionaire*, the ambitious versatility of 1994's *Balls To Picasso*, the snappy cosmic prog of 1996's *Skunkworks* – as well as the profound, elegant metal classicism that is the man's primary skillset – with lyrical references to old songs adding to the cohesive, celebratory vibe. Technically, it's an hour long, but *The Mandrake Project* is so filled with ideas it seems to fly by in no time, yet still feels like an epic journey.

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FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Black Sabbath

CHRIS CHANTLER



ALFAHANNE

Vår Tid Är Nu

DARK ESSENCE

Swedish black'n'rollers in need of more bark with their bite

Songs about death, flames and wolves. Chums with musicians you could charitably label 'naughty'. Naming your band 'alpha male'. Ja, this is Swedish black metal. Alfahanne's fifth album is their most traditionally BM yet, drier than a sand-rat's sphincter, festooned with trve kvlt tremolo and reverb – but is there much else? There's plenty, but it lacks WOOF. *Alfa Omega's* Swedish-as-a-sempla punk kneecaps itself with the cheapest horns this side of the Christmas sales, while the slidy guitar through *Eremiten* and *Wolfman* is more SpongeBob SquarePants than Wayfarer. When Alfahanne balance crusty aggression, bleakness and rock'n'roll catchiness perfectly, you get *g:e Cirkein*. Kvelertak-ish gang vocals and groove abound. Shame the rest is a bit Kampfar-lite.

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FOR FANS OF: Kampfar, Wormwood, Kvelertak

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



BARATRO

The Sweet Smell Of Unrest

IMPROVED SEQUENCE

Ex-Unsane guitarist adds a touch of melody to the battery

While heavy metal withered on the vine in the alt rock 90s, the US noise-rock scene was pulverising ears coast to coast, with Unsane leading the feral pack. After leaving the band in 2017, Unsane

ALBUM REVIEWS

bassist Dave Curran moved to Italy, found a couple of soulmates in a Milan squat, and formed Baratro, who straddle the rocket engine roar of Curran's old band but hammer the relentless assault into something almost tuneful. Their debut album is a careening bulldozer of molasses-thick sludge and face-stabbing hardcore. From the sub-basement rock'n'roll of *Fighting The Parking Meter* to the sickly lurch of *Pope Of Dope, ...Unrest* is as catchy as it is terrifying.

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FOR FANS OF: Unsane, Melvins, Whores

KEN MCINTYRE



BARREN WOMB

Chemical Tardigrade

FUCKING NORTH POLE/BLUES FOR THE RED SUN

Norwegian noise rock duo reassert their invincibility

Barren Womb's 2020 album, *Lizard Lounge*, deservedly caught the attention of a lot of people. A caustic mix of Scandi-rock swagger, wince-inducing sonic chaos and throbbing post-punk rhythms, it gave the pair a high bar to reach with its follow-up. Impressively, this fifth album does that with ease. The most noticeable reason is the production; Barren Womb sound bigger, fatter, heavier, wilder and even more unhinged this time around, but the songs are better, and the scope is broader too. For example, *Bachelor Of Puppets* manages to take Big Black, Bleach-era Nirvana, Queens Of The Stone Age and The Bronx and turn them into one big hard-rock rager. A hugely exciting return.

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FOR FANS OF: Shellac, Death From Above 1979, Lightning Bolt

STEPHEN HILL

**BLOOM*****Maybe In Another Life***

PURE NOISE

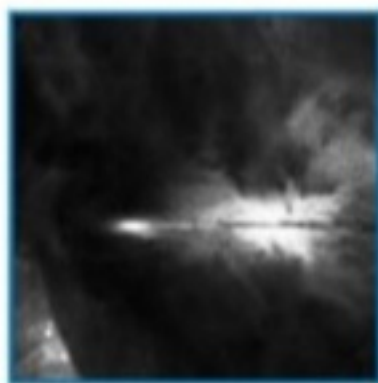
Australian metalcore debutants stick to the script

Bloom add weight to the notion that Australian metal bands can do no wrong. On their debut album, catchy, punching riffs accompany beautiful melodic vocal sections and aggressive screams that leave a lasting impression. The title track is infectious with strong hooks and mean vocals, while *Siren Song* and *Laughing Stock* lean towards more traditional hardcore elements of frenetic drumming and aggressive guitars designed to incite moshpits. The simplicity of each song's composition is what makes this work so well; Bloom don't beat around the bush, and their confident execution will see them added to your must-listen bands of 2024.



FOR FANS OF: *Make Them Suffer*, *Counterparts*, *Polaris*

CHERI FAULKNER

**DARKSPACE*****Dark Space -II***

SEASON OF MIST

Switzerland's cosmic black metal overlords revisit the void

It's been almost a decade since the release of Darkspace's last ambitious broadcast from the celestial abyss. Since then, mainstays Wroth and Zhaaral have parted company with founding member Zorgh, recruiting Yhs along the way, but little else seems to have changed. These Swiss

sentinels continue to chart their own resolutely enigmatic path through negative space, accompanied by a soundtrack of incessant guitar chugs and martial industrialised rhythms. Meanwhile, electronic detritus and slithers of disembodied speech are sporadically jettisoned in Burroughs-ian jumbles of syntax error. Unlike the majority of black metal cosmonauts whose radiant atmospheres offer a technicolour two-step around the stars, Darkspace plunge ever deeper into an all-nullifying interstellar emptiness, their labyrinthine transmissions uniformly cold, viscous, clinical and cruel.



FOR FANS OF: *Paysage d'Hiver*, *Battle Dagorath*, *Arkhtinn*

SPENCER GRADY

**ENTERPRISE EARTH*****Death: An Anthology***

MINOR HEAVY

Reconstructed deathcore heavies get their thrills at the threshold

When vocalist Dan Watson left Enterprise Earth mere months after the release of 2022's *The Chosen*, so did the Spokane deathcore mob's last founding member. Undeterred, and with touring singer Travis Worland promoted to permanent duties, the quartet forged ahead and produced this fifth, mortality-minded record. It's still chock-full of the riffs, breakdowns and throat-wrenching gutturals they're well known for, but there are some twists, like the acoustic guitars that bookend *Casket Of Rust* and the opening to *Blood And Teeth*, which is entirely piano and clean vocals. *Death...* also has a handful of guest appearances,

including Trivium's Matt Heafy, who shows up on the crushing closing track *Curse Of Flesh*. A new chapter has begun for Enterprise Earth, and it's started pretty well.



FOR FANS OF: *Fit For An Autopsy*, *Shadow Of Intent*, *Suffocation*

ELLIOT LEAVER

**FAR BEYOND*****The End Of My Road***

PROSTHETIC

Extreme symphonic metallers offers a familiar, bombastic manifesto

It's incredibly difficult to make a 10-minute song feel exciting for its entire runtime. On this debut album, German solo project Far Beyond do it four times. The ironically named *The End Of My Road* is built with grand, symphonic compositions separated by brief instrumental segues and, over 43 minutes, the formula could easily have grown stale. However, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Eugen Dodenhoeft effectively mines from power, symphonic, black and death metal to make each suite as overblown as humanly possible. The unwavering bombast, epitomised during *Tempus Fugit*'s pseudo-medieval singalongs and *A Symphony Of Light*'s heroic soloing, keeps everything exhilarating, even if the individual ingredients are all familiar to genre fans. In an orchestral and extreme-sounding landscape populated by veterans like Septicflesh, Far Beyond isn't distinct yet, but the unapologetic excess declares Eugen's got potential to burn.



FOR FANS OF: *Septicflesh*, *An Abstract Illusion*, *Ne Obliviscaris*

MATT MILLS



Bokassa refuse to look on the bright side

BOKASSA***All Out Of Dreams***

INDIE RECORDINGS

Lars Ulrich's favourite Nordic punks dial up the metal

OVER RECENT YEARS,

Bokassa have been hand-picked to support Judas Priest, Mastodon and Metallica – with Lars Ulrich having declared them his favourite new band. Some of this must have rubbed off, as *All Out Of Dreams* is the band's most compact and metallic album to date. There are sharp metal riffs aplenty lurking in the flotsam, but there's still a punk rock heart beating beneath it all, wrapped in dense layers of stoner fuzz, a neat line in poppy hooks and frequent curveballs.

The common thread tying all these elements together is a songwriting skill that just keeps getting better. If 2021's splendidly titled *Molotov Rocktail* was a burst of flavours thrown together with uncontrolled enthusiasm, *All Out Of Dreams* is a more considered whole put together by a seasoned mixologist. There's no overarching theme beyond a certain bleakness to the lyrics, but there's more of a flow to the songs.

The Ending Starts Today kicks things off in a cascade of drums and melodic punk guitars before Sick Of It All veteran Lou Koller steps aboard for the hugely hooky holler-along of *Garden Of Heathen*. As well as boasting the joint best title (alongside *Bradford Death Squadron*), *Straight Edgelord* brings in the heavy metallic riffing and casually drops in a soul gospel clap-along section. *Let's Storm The Capitol* throws in catchy 'Woah-oh' hooks, glammy refrains and cowbells, all while taking aim at 'useful idiots' and the demagogues who exploit them. It's also the best song the band have ever written, according to drummer Olav Dowkes' mum.

For such a fun-sounding album, the themes revolve around resignation and despair – without the glimmer of optimism bands outside the doom scene customarily include. There's enough joy in the music to shine through, though, and *All Out Of Dreams* provides a hugely enjoyable rush.



FOR FANS OF: *Turbonegro*, *Clutch*, *The Lawrence Arms*

PAUL TRAVERS



Darkest Hour's reputation is still growing after three decades



DARKEST HOUR

Perpetual / Terminal

MNRK HEAVY

Metallic hardcore's abiding underdogs keep their fires burning

NEXT YEAR WILL mark a full three decades as an active band for Washington DC's cult metallic hardcore heroes Darkest Hour. During that time, they have created a pretty compelling argument for being the most underrated and under-appreciated band from that early 2000s, Killswitch Engage-led, metalcore boom. We're now 10 albums in and the quintet are still full of the pace, ingenuity and spite that has made each of their albums such a pleasure.



Save for the excellent, acoustic opening to the Blind Melon-esque *Mausoleum*, there's really nothing new or explorative on *Perpetual | Terminal*. But when you are as good at filtering classic thrash and melodic death metal through a punk rock framework as this band are, it doesn't matter one jot. The two-stepping rhythms and warp-speed riffing that open *Societal Bile* and *Love Is Fear* or the Integrity-meets-At The Gates melodic brutality of *New Utopian Dream* might seem like easy tropes to rely on, but in the hands of Darkest Hour they sound absolutely box-fresh and essential.

Darkest Hour have never truly received the accolades their work deserves, and there's clearly still a level of hunger and desire to prove themselves that some of their more commercially lauded peers have long since lost.



terminal

to downplay the contribution of the rest of the band; seldom have a collective of this vintage sounded as tight and in sync as DA do on the pulverising *The Nihilist Undone*, or on the chaotic old-school hardcore and gang vocal-led *My Only Regret*. Seven years since the equally excellent *Godless Prophets & the Migrant Flora*, Darkest Hour prove again why those in the know believe they are one of metal's greatest secrets.

FOR FANS OF: *Unearth, God Forbid, Heaven Shall Burn*

STEPHEN HILL

**FARSOT**

Life Promised Death

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Enigmatic Germans extend the black metal spectrum

Farsot's latest is a dense, grunge-tinged odyssey worthy of the Germans' genre-melting renown. *Nausea's* labyrinthine, visceral mix of despair and aggression sets a precedent for the album's deep dive into thematic darkness. Farsot's cryptic allure – the band are identified as numeric pseudonyms – shimmers ineffably through these seven tracks, using black metal as a launchpad for more a nuanced exploration of styles such as post-metal, grunge and prog. The stylistic fusion invokes a thrilling sense of unpredictability. And when tracks like *Buoyant Flames* uncork the blastbeats, it's an exhilarating nod to Farsot's Norwegian influences. Lyrically compelling and sonically vast, *Life...* is a transfixing voyage that boldly reaffirms this band's avant-garde legacy.

FOR FANS OF: *A Forest Of Stars*, *Ultha*, *Almyrkvi*

JOE DALY



THE GEMS

Phoenix

NAPALM

*Former Thundermother members
kick out a new set of jams*

In 2023 singer Guernica Mancini was fired from Thundermother and, in a show of solidarity, bassist Mona Lindgren and drummer Emlee Johansson quit, all three quickly forming The Gems and

releasing their debut – a fierce and defiant ‘fuck you’ of razor-sharp rock’n’roll. There’s no avoiding Thundermother’s DNA on *Phoenix*, but it fizzies with confidence. Mona, who also plays guitar here, has a chance to truly show off her six-string skills. From Guernica’s rich warbling on rabble-rouser *Queens* to *Like A Phoenix*’s FM-friendly riffage and *P.S.Y.C.H.O.*’s blistering attack, The Gems are intent on keeping the good times rolling.

FOR FANS OF: The Pretty Reckless, Thundermother, H.E.A.T

HOLLY WRIGHT



GUHTS

Regeneration

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Eclectic Brooklynites take a scenic tour through the underworld

Going on name alone, you might expect Guhts to peddle some form of knuckle-dragging sludge, but the reality is very different. *Regeneration* might be slow and immeasurably dense, but the glacial shift of the riffs serve as a backdrop. Starkweather-esque melodies and shimmering, dissonant prettiness are pushed to the fore, while vocalist Amber Gardner puts in a startlingly diverse performance, cooing, crooning and howling as though tumbling headfirst toward the gates of Hell. Piano, smudges of electronica and tremolo-picked moments that blur the lines between post-rock and black metal all play their part, and *Regeneration* benefits mightily from such a colourful palette.

FOR FANS OF: Isis, King
Woman, Deftones

ALEX DELLER



Ihsahn extends his hero's journey once more

IHSAHN

Ihsahn

CANDLELIGHT / MNEMOSYNE PRODUCTIONS

Orchestral manoeuvres from black metal's brightest maverick

WHEN IHSAHN

RELEASED his lavish, shelf-threatening box set, *The Hyperborean Collection*, in 2021, it was a very clear and purposeful clearing of the decks. From Emperor's four classic albums to solo triumphs like *After* and *Åmr*, the Norwegian has achieved more than most and could easily have slacked off for a bit, satisfied with a job well done. Instead, he's made the most ambitious and extravagant album of his career.

A concept piece devoted to some hazily defined hero's epic journey, *Ihsahn* is a game of two distinct halves. The first presents an astonishing splurge of new songs: still firmly within the Norwegian's self-created wheelhouse of artful, restless black metal, but with full and florid orchestral elements throughout. Ihsahn has been mixing strings with metallic bombast for more than 30 years, but never with quite this much unabashed ingenuity and flair. Here, metal band and orchestra are woven seamlessly together, each surge of violins or brass adding colour, definition and extra muscle to these intricate songs' wayward momentum.

And what songs they are. *The Promethean Spark* and *Pilgrimage To Oblivion* are as vicious and volatile as anything in Ihsahn's past, but with more twists, turns and cinematic sumptuousness than ever before; *Twice Born* is three-and-a-half minutes of evolved black metal prog perfection; *Hubris And Blue Devils* is a crazed riot of ideas, from jagged, *Twilight Zone*-style guitar motifs and blistering blastbeats to unsettling oases of warped circus music. Closing epic *At The Heart Of All Things Broken* is staggeringly beautiful and crushing in equal measure, and may be the finest thing Ihsahn has ever written.

The album's second half comprises the same 11 songs, arranged solely for the orchestra, and with elegantly immersive results. In its opulent entirety, *Ihsahn* represents a proud and confident raising of the stakes for one of metal's greatest visionaries.

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FOR FANS OF: Emperor, Arcturus, Wilderun

DOM LAWSON



NAKÉ

Nake

SELF-RELEASED

Prog and sci-fi excursions from Danish instru-metal debutants

This Danish instrumental quartet's debut takes inspiration from John Carpenter and Morricone film scores as much as it does from the likes of Night Verses and Pelican. *Nake* also ventures into prog territory, with retro space-age synths liberally sprinkled throughout. This will either be music to your ears or a sadistic form of audio torture, but props to Nake for fully embracing and realising a potentially polarising sound on their first try. *Weaver's* rhythmic patterns and tribal drums evoke Tool perhaps a tad too closely, but the quartet are capable of surprising turns as well, such as the rip-roaring Malmsteen-esque guitar solo nestled in the middle of opening track *Offering*.

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FOR FANS OF: Between The Buried And Me, John Carpenter, Chimp Spanner

REMFREY DEDMAN



NIGHT FEVER

Dead End

SVART

Danish high-energy hardcore punks know how to do it

These hardcore punks are back, with lashings of raucous energy and deliciously old-school fretwork. The seriously sticky *Lone Wolf* is a perfect example of their full-pelt power and pace, and the rest of the songwriting here is just as strong. Forged for

fuelling moshpits, they're fast and furious without ever losing sight of the hooks and melodies needed along the way. Dynamic frontman Salomon Segers' high, urgent vocal style is still polarising but also offers more variety this time around, as seen with the punchier delivery in *Reunited* and *Up The Wall*. This is a gem.

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FOR FANS OF: Misfits, Tyrant, Municipal Waste

NIK YOUNG



PERSEFONE

Lingua Ignota: Part I

NAPALM

Andorran prog metal underdogs make their bid for stardom

Despite being endorsed by Cynic leader Paul Masvidal and inking a deal with Napalm Records, Persefone still remain massively underrated. The Andorran extreme/progressive metal unit have been dealing in uber-technical melodicism for 20 years now – and here they scream for broader recognition. Openers *Sounds And Vessels* and *One Word* counterbalance the band's complexities with an upfront, singable hook. *The Equable* emphasises the near-operatic pipes of new singer Daniel Rodríguez Flys, and *Lingua Ignota* crams itself with full-throttle Lamb Of God-style riffing. Although these 26 minutes don't do anything that peers from *Ne Obliviscaris* to Allegaeon haven't already attempted, the immediacy and infectiousness should help push Persefone to new heights.

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FOR FANS OF: Allegaeon, Black Crown Initiate, Rivers Of Nihil

MATT MILLS

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe



LITOSTH

Cesariana

PERSONAL

Unusually for a Brazilian band, Litosth eschew filth in favour of vastness and splendour. Their fourth LP offers classy, wall-of-sound blackened DM: symphonic in scope and executed with perfectionist zeal.

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DOM LAWSON



MYRATH

Karma

EARMUSIC

These Tunisians' sixth LP is their most effective fusion so far of Eastern mysticism and Western metal. Though unapologetically melodic, its muso-friendly thrust and dynamics will render Dream Theater fans agog.

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DAVE LING



PAINT THE SKY RED

Tamat

SELF-RELEASED

This Malaysian post-rock collective bow out with a series of gorgeously melodic soundscapes that build and fade expertly. Filled with sublime nuance and subtleties, *Tamat* rewards repeat listens.

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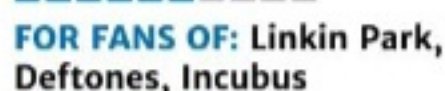
STEPHEN HILL



A Digital Nowhere

Bristolian debutants set out to recreate the nu metal dream

Profiler's debut album comes out of the gate strong as its fierce opener, *All In Forever*, contains clear influences of Limp Bizkit and Deftones. This Bristolian trio are joining the nu metal revival, but injecting it with elements of shoegaze and grunge. Standout tracks *Artifice*, *Zero*, *Animo* and *To Utopia* all boast an enjoyable mix of aggressive riffs, swirling melodies, screams, and nostalgic rap. Unfortunately, some other tracks on here, such as *Consumed* and *Delay*, step away from the delicate balance of the furious and the ethereal nailed so brilliantly by bands like Linkin Park and Loathe, as what start out as potentially powerful dreamy contrasts have a habit of losing momentum.

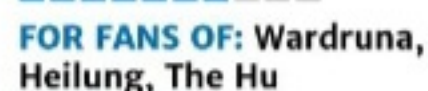


Spirits

Lithuania's pagan folk metallers straddle the ages on album four

If you've had your interest piqued by the tribalistic, earthy sounds of Heilung and Wardruna, but wished they incorporated electric elements, then this fourth record by Lithuanians Romuvos will answer all your prayers. Beginning as a one-man project in 2014,

they've since expanded to a five-piece, combining those steady, ritual-styled drums and chanting vocals – which flit between English, their native tongue and old Prussian – with folk metal riffs and melodies. The rhythmic guitar chugs and deep, bass voices on *Sun And The Morning Star* evoke notions of an East European answer to The Hu, while the more atmospheric notes of *Become As One* are a gorgeous marriage of contemporary and traditional instruments. Romuvos have leaned more on their more pagan and acoustic influences here than on previous releases, and it's paid off well.



The First Disgrace

Grave Lines and Torpor members take an industrial left turn

Those familiar with the UK metal scene's bristly, scab-encrusted underbelly may well have encountered the duo behind Roscian in some form or other – perhaps via Dead Existence, Torpor or Grave Lines. While undeniably *heavy*, this new project is an entirely different beast, with Jake Harding and Simon Mason lacing the album's dense doom and gloom with electronic elements and dour, dolorous melody. The not-so-quick one-two of *To End, To Begin* and *What Cannot Be Soothed* suggests a fondness for Justin Broadrick's work, touching base with Godflesh and Jesu, but also Final and Techno Animal. As the album progresses, the pair blend synth-pop with industrial brutality and

pepper proceedings with brief moments of bleakly tuneful ambience. Boasting talent and ideas aplenty, *The First Disgrace* is a strong start indeed – here's hoping many more disgraces are to follow.



TOWARD THE SEA

Traverse The Bealach

Epic, apocalyptic laments from across the Scottish Highlands

Sgàile's heartfelt catharsis is the work of Tony Dunn, a Scottish multi-instrumentalist and bassist/backing vocalist for folk/black metal troupe Cnoc An Tursa, who's translated his love for long-distance walking in the majesty of his native Highlands into a progressive metal odyssey. 2021's under-celebrated debut album, *Ideals & Morality*, laid the foundations for *Traverse The Bealach's* post-apocalyptic concept. Here, Tony's clean, earnest and multi-layered vocals come to the fore to soaring effect. As heard in lead single *Lamentations By The Lochan*, black metal remains a strong element within these predominantly mellifluous environs. Long tracks frequently build to moments of pure exhilaration, as on the pealing solo of *The Ptarmigans Cry* and the explosive release of scattershot drums and riffs on *Silence*. Authentic and intelligent, *Traverse The Bealach* is an emotionally epic trek worth putting in the miles for.



Gilded Sorrow

Maryland's doom legends expand their reach

their last volley of new material, *The Obsessed's* latest outing marks a significant leap forward for both the band and their founder, Scott 'Wino' Weinrich, who helped to pioneer the doom and sludge movements of the 90s. The band have long transcended their mid-70s punk roots, surviving break-ups, hiatuses and reunions to emerge as a steady, if sporadic, force in doom. For Wino (Saint Vitus, Spirit Caravan, Shrinebuilder), this is testament to his daring artistic vision and a dramatic departure from the raw essence of the band's early output.



Gilded Sorrow navigates varying degrees of intensity, with each track showcasing a different aspect of the band's pedigree. *Daughter Of An Echo* delivers a surging, funk-laden groove that showcases the fretboard wizardry of new guitarist Jason Taylor. His ability to effortlessly mesh into Wino's punchy riffs highlights a nuanced evolution towards a more layered sound, echoed on *Realize A Dream* and *Wellspring - Dark Sunshine*.

The powerful, refined production allows the songs to breathe and expand, shedding the lo-fi aesthetic of their past work. This is particularly evident on *Lucky Free Nice Machine* and the mesmerising title track, a glacial powerhouse with smouldering leads and chilling, evocative atmospherics. Nonetheless, *Gilded Sorrow* won't disappoint the band's doomy denizens, packing several concussive, downtuned bangers infused with a sharp psychedelic edge, such as *Stoned Back To The Bomb Age* and *Yen Sleep*.

The Obsessed have erected a formidable addition to their legacy and to the wider heavy metal canon. This is an album that venerates the band's storied past while revitalising their creative vision – a characteristic that is emblematic of Wino's career. A must-listen for fans of the genre and a compelling entry point for newer voyagers into the world of doom.





Static-X: still paying tribute to Wayne's world

STATIC-X

Project: Regeneration Vol. 2

OTSEGO ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

Resurrected industrial metallers keep their batteries charged

CONSIDERING MOST PEOPLE would have fully expected Static-X to have ceased in the aftermath of iconic frontman Wayne Static's passing in 2014, the current iteration of the band is a surprisingly enjoyable one. Once you got past the somewhat troubling image of Wayne's replacement Xero being positioned as a zombified version of his predecessor, the shows the band played in tribute to him were a great reminder of how many fun songs they had.

Maybe even more impressive was the fact that when *Project: Regeneration Vol. 1* was released in 2020, they still sounded worthy of the Static-X name, even if it wasn't quite up to the standard of the band's excellent first pair of millennium-straddling albums, *Wisconsin Death Trip* and *Machine*.

So no one really should be too shocked that *Project: Regeneration Vol. 2* is a perfectly serviceable, and often very enjoyable, Static-X album. It seems impossible to imagine that fans of the band won't be delighted to hear the thumping electronic grooves, juddering riffs and manic, rasping vocal

stylings of their patented death disco all present and correct on tracks like *Zombie* or *Take Control*. Both are hugely catchy and are guaranteed to get heads banging and hips swinging, despite being fairly rudimentary by 2024 standards.

Admittedly, there isn't much in the way of growth, breadth or dynamism here, with every song being some kind of attempt at industrial rock floor filler. Fourteen tracks of that (including bonus tracks), though, does

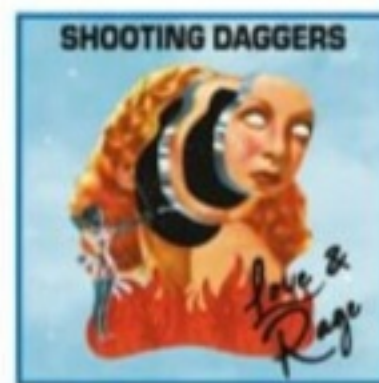
start to drag a bit, and a bemusing, clunky cover of Nine Inch Nails' *Terrible Lie* shows that Static-X fall short of being considered an A-list band from this genre.

These are just minor quibbles, though. Considering how many people scoffed at the very idea of Static-X without their most recognisable member when this reunion was announced, this line-up continues to prove its worth.



FOR FANS OF: Pitchshifter, 3Teeth, Powerman 5000

STEPHEN HILL



SHOOTING DAGGERS

Love & Rage

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

UK queercore trio unleash the true spirit of punk rock

The extent to which the term 'punk rock' is thrown around far too loosely and liberally these days is always brought into sharp focus when a band who exhibit all its best and most essential elements turn up. This London-based, multicultural, queercore trio's debut album is a superbly exciting romp through all the best bits of DC hardcore, the earliest days of CBGB's and the dirtiest, grimmest era of Seattle grunge. It's all delivered with an uncontrollable, utterly uncompromising vitality all too rare in the more sanitised world of modern punk rock. In a mere nine songs and 21 minutes, Shooting Daggers may well have already made 2024's finest punk album.



FOR FANS OF: X-Ray Spex, Veruca Salt, Bad Brains

STEPHEN HILL



SLOPE

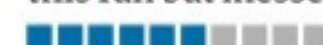
Freak Dreams

CENTURY MEDIA

Germany's unruly funk/punk metallers turn up the heat

Before the Red Hot Chili Peppers became bare-chested denizens of daytime radio, they specialised in a chaotic splurge of punk, funk and psychedelic weirdness that was bold, brash and out of control. Slope take us back to those freaky styley days and, if half of it didn't feel

like a straight rehash, *Freak Dreams* would be magnificent. When they bring in a selection of heavier punk metal riffs on the likes of *Nosedive* and *Ain't Easy*, they end up sounding like the Beastie Boys instead. There's a lot of reckless energy, though, and the Germans actually form the chaos into better songs than the Chilis did back in the day, making this fun but inessential.



FOR FANS OF: Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beastie Boys, Turnstile

PAUL TRAVERS



EINAR SOLBERG

The Congregation Acoustic

INSIDE OUT

Leprous leader strips down a prog metal masterpiece

By singer/keyboardist Einar Solberg's own admission, *The Congregation* is one of the worst albums to do a stripped-down reinterpretation of. Not only is Leprous' fourth album hailed by many as a masterpiece, so much of its excellence comes from the interplay between guitars, keys and electronica. Naturally, in performing for a livestream alone with just a piano, Einar removes those textures from the music. Yet, the frontman also reaffirms that good songs are good songs, no matter their form. *Slave* is still as anthemic as before, Einar howling the hook and pounding the keys, while his long, uninterrupted croons during *The Price* and *The Flood* equally entice and impress. On his own, the musician's made an emotional counterpoint to one of his band's greatest musical statements.



FOR FANS OF: Leprous, A.A. Williams, Ólafur Arnalds

MATT MILLS

